1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

776 778 considered sacred, and it is not permitted to cut it down. A woman in her periods is not allowed to go near the platform as cobra-deities are considered to be specially sensitive to defilement. If this rule is not respected, she, and probably the *okka* of which she is a member, will suffer misfortune. The cobra is a sacred creature and he who kills it will suffer from a skin disease like leucoderma.

243 778 There is an attitude of ritual respect towards the ancestral rice-field. This is specially noticeable when the crop is standing: a man may not wear sandals while walking through it, or hold an umbrella over his head, or whistle.

The rice-field is divided into a number of ridged-up plots and the central plot of the rice-field is regarded as particularly sacred. [846] Formerly it was the custom to bury the umbilical cord of the eldest son in the central plot. A man is supposed to have a special affinity to the place where his umbilical cord is buried. If a Coorg boy is found going to a particular place frequently, his elders twit him, [871] 'Is your umbilical cord buried there?' Nowadays the umbilical cord is buried in the yard of the palace of Mercara, or in a school-compound, because Coorgs want their sons to do well in examinations and become high government officials.

764 778 A part of the ancestral estate is used for burying or cremating the dead members of the *okka*. The part where corpses are buried is called *kēkaḷa* while the adjoining part used for cremation is called *tūṭangaḷa*.[1] It is sacred, but in an undesirable way: the term 'bad-sacred' has been used to denote such a ritual condition. (Bad-sacredness includes within itself both 'defilement and 'inauspi-[783] ciousness'.) A visit to the burial-ground defiles a person and a bath is necessary to restore him to normal ritual status.

764 775 The burial-ground for children may be near the house, whereas that for adults must be as far away as possible. The ghosts of adults [858] are harmful, while children's ghosts are comparatively harmless. An adult has a social personality, whereas a child does not have one. An adult occupies a social role or several social roles. The ghost of a headman or hero or a particularly evil man is more powerful than [765] that of an ordinary man. The mourning-period also varies according to age and social importance of the deceased.

[1] Amongst Coorgs, the corpses of elders and important people are cremated, [564] while the corpses of children and unimportant people are buried. The Brahmins, however, cremate all dead persons except infants, and in many parts of south India castes which want to rise in status give up burial for cremation.

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An unwashed state is an impure state, and taking a bath and changing into clean clothes alter the ritual status of the subject. While this is generally true we must, however, guard ourselves against completely identifying physical purity or cleanliness with ritual purity. It is not every bath that changes the ritual status of the subject.

A ritual bath alters the subject's ritual status. It adds to his ritual purity and makes him fit to pray, or to be possessed by a deity. But sometimes the emphasis is on the bath terminating a condition of ritual impurity. That is to say, instead of a bath adding purity to normal ritual status, it might only be putting an end to ritual impurity, which is a condition inferior to normal ritual status. For instance, a mother is ritually impure for fifty-nine days after the birth of her child. On the twelfth day, however, she attains partial purity after a bath and this enables her to enter the central hall and kitchen but not the south-western room. The child is ritually given a name on the twelfth day.

But complete purity is only attained on the sixtieth day when a ceremony called *aruvud* (literally, the sixtieth) is performed. The mother has a bath, changes her clothes, marks her forehead with three horizontal stripes of *vibhūti* or sacred ashes,[1] and then performs certain rites.

The important point to note here is that on both the twelfth and the sixtieth days a bath marks the termination of ritual impurity. It is also preliminary to the performance of certain rites.

That a ritual bath is different from an ordinary bath is made clear from the fact that the confined mother has an elaborate massage and bath every day, beginning with the day the baby is born. The massage and bath last several hours, but their object is therapeutic and not ritual. It is only on the twelfth and sixtieth days that a bath alters the ritual condition of the mother.[2] All baths clean the body, but only some purify as well as clean.

Greater ritual purity or merit ensues from a cold-water bath than from a hot-water bath. If the subject takes a cold-water bath while wearing his ritual robes, even greater ritual merit is acquired. Thus

[1] All over south India devotees of the god Shiva mark their foreheads every morning with three horizontal stripes of *vibhūti* or sacred ashes.

[2] Orthodox Brahmins frequently keep a cloth which they dip in water and squeeze dry and tie round their waists while performing certain rites. This cloth is frequently not very clean, whereas a snow-white *dhoti* brought by the washerman is ritually impure.

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mourners are required to perform certain rites while their clothes are wet and dripping.

On the twelfth or sixteenth day of the death of a person the ceremony of *māda* is performed and this puts an end to ritual mourning for all except the first-grade mourners. Until the performance of *māda*, the mourners offer food every day to the spirit of the dead person. When making these offerings they are required frequently to take a plunge in a well or pond with their clothes on. But this is not a pleasant thing to do, and especially so in the wet and cold seasons, and consequently, after the first plunge for the day, the mourners content themselves by washing their hands and feet, and wetting a corner of their waist-cloths. This is regarded as sufficient to meet the ends of ritual purity. Such a traditionally sanctioned mechanism makes ritual simpler and less inconvenient to the persons concerned.

The widower (or widow) and eldest son go, after the mourning period is over, to Bhāgamaṇḍla where the rivers Kāvēri and Kanaké meet. After a shave, they bathe in the confluence of the two rivers, and then offer balls of rice-flour to the dead person's spirit. This is followed by a visit to the temple of Bhagaṇḍēshwara where the mourners offer worship. Subsequently they go to the source of the River Kāvēri, bathe in the larger spring, worship the smaller spring, and then return home.

Two ideas can be distinguished in the above ritual acts: (1) a ritual bath alters the ritual status of the subject; and (2) bathing in a sacred river is not only purifying in a ritual sense, but also removes the sins of the bather. This latter idea is shared by Hindus all over India, and when a Coorg bathes in the Kāvēri he participates in a ritual idiom that spreads all over India. The Kāvēri is a sacred river for Hindus in every part of south India, and it is even called the '*dakshiṇa ganga*' or the Southern Ganges. Bathing in the Ganges, or in any other sacred river, rids a person of the sins he has committed both in this and in a previous existence. It confers on him spiritual merit (*puṇya*).

Sanskritic Hinduism has incorporated into itself the idea that bathing changes the ritual status of the bather, and has elaborated it in such a manner that pious Hindus believe in the sin-cleansing and merit-conferring powers of sacred rivers.

On the seventh or twelfth day after the birth of a child in a Coorg house, the washerman comes with a vessel full of water in which

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coulu or salt-impregnated earth[1] has been dissolved. With the aid of a few mango leaves he sprinkles the solution all over the house and this act rids the house of its impurity and restores it to normal ritual status. Nowadays, however, Coorgs increasingly call on a Brahmin to purify the house on the twelfth day.

It is probable the washerman was employed as purifier because of his occupation. But such a duty is not consistent with the position he normally occupies in the caste hierarchy. For instance, he is prohibited from entering the more sacred parts of an ancestral house, like the kitchen and central hall, as he defiles them by his presence. If, however, he has to enter them in the exercise of his duties—at marriage he covers the ceiling of the central hall with clean white sheets—they are purified subsequently. But no such inconsistency exists in the case of the Brahmin, and the increasing tendency to employ him is part of the general process of Sanskritization of Coorg customs.

VIII

After having been given a bath by three married women, the groom is helped into his ritual robes and ornaments by the best man. He has to wear a white cotton gown for the *mūrta*, and this is worn in such a way that the right side comes over the left side. A red silk sash secures the gown at the waist. The ornamental Coorg knife, *piché katti*, is tucked into the sash in front, and the broad Coorg sword, *oḍi katti*, hangs from its clasp at the groom's back. The clasp is fixed to a chain which is tied round the groom's waist. The groom also wears a number of ornaments.

The groom wears the Coorg turban (*pāni manḍé tuṇi*) which is flat at the top and also covers the back of the head. He may not wear any sandals, however, as leather defiles. He carries in his hand a staff (*gejjé tanḍ*) with small bells tied to it near the top.

The bride wears a uniform of red silk: a red silk *sari*, a red silk full-sleeved Coorg blouse (*kaḷa kupya*), and a red silk scarf which is tied round her head. She wears bangles, necklaces, ear-rings, and also ornaments on her ankles, feet, and toes.

The best man and matron of honour hold a white cloth umbrella over the groom and bride respectively.[2]

[1] The washerman uses *coulu* for washing clothes.

[2] Round about Mercara the bride and groom both wear a red silk veil during *mūrta*. In the southernmost part of Coorg, however, the veil is not worn by

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All-India worship of Agni and Sūrya.[1] Coorgs are drawn into an All-India ritual idiom which is mainly Sanskritic in character.

X

The sprinkling of rice on a person or thing is a common ritual act in Coorg, and it is one of the several acts which together form the ritual of *mūrta*. An instance of the ritual sprinkling of rice will be considered now with a view to discovering its meaning.

Birth results in pollution for the mother, the new-born infant, and the *okka* of which the mother is a member. While the other members of the polluted *okka* attain normal ritual status on the twelfth day of birth, the mother herself remains polluted till the sixtieth day. On that day, after a bath which ends her long period of pollution, she performs a certain ritual which signifies her resumption of her normal, pre-pollution duties.

One of her normal duties is the bringing of water from the domestic well into the kitchen, and the resumption of this particular duty is dramatized in '*Ganga pūja*' (worship of Ganga or Ganges). The confined woman has a bath, after which she changes into ritually pure garments. She then goes to the domestic well accompanied by two married women. First of all she salutes the sun by throwing some rice grains into the air, and this is followed by putting small quantities of rice thrice into the well. She then drops a few betel leaves, with the smooth side on top, into the well, and also empties the milk of a slit coconut into it. Finally, the confined woman and, after her, her two companions draw water from the well in vessels and carry the latter into the kitchen.

During the later stages of pregnancy, and for two months after the birth of the child, the confined woman has been freed from all domestic duties. The resumption of her domestic duties on the sixtieth day of the birth of the child is dramatized in the ritual of '*Ganga pūja*'. Her relationship with the domestic well has been broken for some time and the resumption of this relationship is not without a certain amount of 'awkwardness', as in the case of two human beings. The worship of the domestic well, the solidarity rites performed towards it, the offering of betel leaves and a coconut all make the process of resumption of contact smoother.

[1] It may be argued, however, that the attribution of sacredness to the domestic lamp and stove is derived from the worship of Agni and Sūrya, and not vice versa.

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instance of the silent and effective transformation of an original Coorg custom into a similar, though not identical, Sanskritic custom.

A girl ought to get married and become a mother, and a mother is honoured among Coorgs. The bond between a mother and child is the most intimate of bonds and this fact expresses itself in ritual. While other relatives, including the infant's father, become free from birth-pollution on the twelfth day, the mother becomes free from pollution only on the sixtieth day. The stronger the bond prevalent the longer is the period of pollution, and this is so in birth as well as death.

When an infant whose milk teeth have not appeared dies, it is buried without ceremony, and a half of a coconut shell containing milk from the mother's breast is kept over the grave. Only the mother is required to take a bath and change into pure clothes.

The special importance of the maternal bond is recognized at marriage also: the mother is the first person to perform *mūrta* to the bride or groom, provided she is not a widow. The mother has to give her money-gift enclosed in a purse, and this is tied to the frontal breast-knot of the bride's *sari*.

It is not only in ritual that the strength of the mother–child bond is acknowledged: a number of proverbs testify to its strength. One compares the motherless child to a crop in drought. Another tells us that the father becomes a firebrand after the mother is dead. In proverbs the mother is the tender figure and she contrasts with the father who is comparatively lacking in affection and fickle. He can be trusted only as long as the mother is alive, and once the mother dies, his affection for his children decreases. He is likely to take up another wife who will be the focus of his interest and attention.

The dependence of children on their mother later gives way to great regard and respect for her, and this fact complicates the husband–wife relationship. A man does not like his wife's criticizing his mother, and even if he discovers that his mother does not treat his wife properly he would be loath to intervene.

The bond prevalent between a mother and her daughter is always a very deep one, and has a great poignancy because the daughter, on marriage, has to leave her natal home for her conjugal home. The mother is aware that her sons have all the rights, privileges, and power in the ancestral house, whereas her daughters have to leave their natal home and spend their lives among people who will, to say the least, be critical of her in the first few years.

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The entire rice-field (*varga*) is cut up into a number of small rectangular plots ridged up on all the four sides. Each plot (*tēva*) is referred to by a distinct name, and one of these plots is regarded as the main plot and it has the same name as the entire rice-field. The traditional association between an *okka* and its ancestral estate is symbolized in the custom of burying the umbilical cord of the eldest son of the head of the *okka* in the main plot of the ancestral estate. The eldest son is the one who is going to become the head of the *okka* in course of time, and as head of the *okka* he will have to look after the ancestral rice-field. The main plot stands for the entire rice-field, and it is entirely proper that the umbilical cord of the future head of the *okka* should be buried in the main plot. It may be recalled, in this connexion, that during the periodical ancestor-propitiation, the Baṇṇa oracle, possessed by an ancestor, may demand to be shown round the rice-field in order to see for himself whether it is looked after properly. Thus a Coorg continues to take an interest in the affairs of his *okka* even after his death, which means that he continues to care for the rice-field on which the prosperity and happiness of the *okka* and thus, indirectly, of the total society depends.

Every stage of the cultivation of the rice crop is marked by ritual. The main plot of the ancestral rice-field is ritually ploughed on the first of Aries, the beginning of the new year according to the solar calendar. Either the head of the *okka*, or a younger member who is considered to be specially suitable by the astrologer, ritually ploughs the main plot during an auspicious period of time. Regular ploughing of the rice-fields commences only after the ritual ploughing on New Year's Day.

Paddy is sown in the nurseries at an auspicious period of time. When the plants are 10–12 inches high, they are transferred to the various plots in the rice-fields. The plucking of the young plants and their transplantation are both begun during auspicious periods. The transplantation of the young plants is a highly complicated task requiring the co-ordination of the work of a number of people. It is especially so if the estate is a big one.

The Kāvēri festival includes a rite called *bottu* (lit., fear) and this is intended to protect the growing crop, the woods on the estate, and the domestic well.

One of the most important calendar festivals of Coorgs is the *putri* (lit., new rice) when the paddy sheaves are ritually cut.

[74 726 595] have been exterminated under such a state of affairs. But if the surviving brothers were to become the rightful husbands of the widows, a second and an undiminished generation might in time take the place of the fallen. In more recent times, the Rajas used to keep a large number of armed men constantly in attendance on themselves. They were absent from home for weeks and months. On their return, their brothers would have to go to the Palace or accompany the Raja on some hunting or fighting expedition. The brothers at home would then take the place of the absent from home [428] and family. It is clear that the law of inheritance by the sister's son is unknown among the Coorgs. This, according to Richter, affords the strongest proof that polyandry is no Coorg custom.

Widow Marriage

587 Widows may remarry. Should any of the deceased husband's brothers choose to marry her, he may do so or she may be married to any other man. By doing so, she acquires the rights of the second husband and relinquishes all interest in her late husband's property, but not in her children. A second marriage is celebrated in a quiet manner and only the nearer relatives and some of the villagers are invited to the marriage feast. The strewing of rice and other ceremonies are dispensed with. After the removal of signs of widowhood, the bride appears in the apparel of married life.

Divorce

586 A man can divorce an unfaithful wife, but a wife has no remedy against her husband in case of his faithlessness. The Takkas, the Aruva of the house, the Takkas of the village, and some members of the wife's family with her Aruva meet in the hall of the husband's house, when as at betrothal the lamp is put between them; and the Aruva solemnly relinquishes the wife's claim to the husband's property. The children remain in the father's house and the unhappy woman returns with all her belongings to the parental roof. It has to be stated to the credit of Coorg women that such events are very rare.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

844 A woman's first confinement takes place at her mother's house whither she returns after the seventh month of pregnancy. There are no professional midwives among them. The women of the household who have experience for their guidance render all the assistance. A few hours after ● 846 birth she is bathed in very hot water, and with the abdomen well bound up, she is brought to bed in a lying posture in the best room of the house. This practice is quite at variance with what prevails among other Hindus [783] who relegate a woman in childbirth to an outhouse. Though the period of pollution lasts for seven days, a woman enjoys immunity from all house-

3:Iyer E-5 (no date) 1948 . AW5 Coorg AW5

hold duties for 60 days to recover her normal health, and devote herself to her baby. During this period she daily bathes in hot water after having been well rubbed with castor oil before a charcoal fire. The robust health of a Coorg woman is no doubt due to the care taken by them during pregnancy and confinement.

Naming Ceremony

As soon as a Coorg boy is born, a little bow of a castor oil plant stick with an arrow made of a leaf stalk of the same plant is put into his little hands and a gun is fired in the courtyard. He is thus at taking his first breath introduced into the world as a future hunter and warrior. This ceremony is not generally now observed. On the twelfth day after birth, the child is laid into a cradle by the mother or grandmother who gives the name, which in many instances is well sounding and significant. Boys are known by Belliappah, Ponnappa, Mandanna and girls Puvakka, Muthakka and Chinnamma. The Coorg women are very prolific and bear children to the extent of ten or twelve. In cases of necessity a wet-nurse is engaged, but infanticide is not practised.

Family

The Coorg family is of the patriarchal type. It is the domicile of all male relatives and their children belonging to one parental stock. Two or three generations, grandfather, grandmother, their sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and other children numbering from 20 to 60 or even more in some cases, all live and mess together. The labourers who were once their slaves belong to the family and depend on their mistress for food and orders. So long as there is peace and harmony, a Coorg family is a fine example of the patriarchal type. Every domestic affair of importance can be undertaken only with the consent of the senior member. He is expected to look after the principal needs of the family and its members individually and check irregularities of all kinds by sound discipline. The nature and extent of his control may be gathered from the fact that married sons and their wives choose their residence under the paternal roof to avoid the responsibility of a separate establishment. The senior female member is the queen of the household, and holds a corresponding position among the junior members and their wives and daughters. The peace and harmony of the family that once prevailed may be marred by discord, by the harsh treatment of an imperious mother-in-law, by the jealousy and heart-burnings of the married members of the material questions affecting the family income and individual claims. The senior member who is the Karnavan of the family has no easy position under such circumstances. The domestic life under normal circumstances is brightened by the affection of the children for their parents and relatives, and the little ones, of whom there is generally a good number, are in turn great pets of the family. The bearing of the young in the presence of the old is decorous, but the grown-up members are not

3:Iyer E-5 (no date) 1948 AW5 Coorg AW5

professed patronage of the Brahmans and that they gradually dropped into brahmanical habits of life and thought. A good many now wear the holy thread, and all profess to abstain from meat and fermented liquors. The return to Brahman initiation and dress was brought about by a Havika Brahman whose family exercised spiritual influence over the Amma Kodagas. They are still unlettered. There is a tradition current among them that in former times one half of Coorg belonged to the Ammas, and the rest to the Coorgs. The Ammas by virtue of their priesthood held their land free of rent. Their lands are even now very lightly taxed.

Internal Structure

The Amma Coorgs form a homogeneous community. There are two gotras among them, the Baradwaja gotra and Viswamitra gotra. They marry within the same gotra.

Marriage Customs and Ceremonies

The Amma Coorgs do not intermarry with the Coorgs, but the separation may be of recent origin. Marriage settlement is made only after the agreement of horoscopes. The young man's father, uncle, and other close relations assemble, when coconuts, plantains, and betel leaves are handed to the bride in token of settlement. The auspicious day for celebration is fixed to send invitations to the relatives on both sides. The dress and ornaments to be given to the bride are also settled. The preliminary formalities that are gone through are :—

1. The boy's party going to the house of the bride.
2. Their welcome with refreshments.
3. Nischithambulam.

The essential formalities are *mukadarsana*, and garlanding and *panigrahana*, tali-tying, presenting the bride with the wedding dress and ornaments, and feasting. There is no *homam* as among the Coorgs, but there exists the cutting of plantains in common with the Coorgs. On the arrival of the bride at the bridegroom's house, she puts rice on the lamp. On the third day they bathe, and celebrate the *sobhanaprasta*, if the girl has attained puberty already.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

When a girl becomes pregnant, *pumsavana* and *simantha* are performed. When she is about to become a mother, she is confined to a separate room. Her mother or some aged woman acts as midwife. Pollution lasts for eleven days after which she bathes to become pure. But it is only after 40 days that ganga puja is performed, when she bathes and becomes pure. Only then can she enter the kitchen. Cradling the baby takes place on the eleventh day. The naming ceremony takes place the same day.

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

d. Childbirth.

The birth of a child renders not only the mother of the new born babe, but the whole house unclean and every one who may come in contact with them. This ceremonial uncleanness (Sútaka) lasts for 7 days, be the babe male or female. The mother is confined for 2 months to the house and not expected to engage in any work, but to recover her strength and to devote herself entirely to her child. This singular custom no doubt greatly contributes to the general good health and vigour of the Coorg women. Daughters are not much valued. They must be brought up and yet are destined to be entirely alienated from the house by their marriage. Boys are the stay of families. As soon as a Coorg boy is born, a little bow of a castor-oil-plant stick with an arrow, made of a leafstalk of the same plant, is put into his little hands, and a gun fired at the same time in the yard. He is thus, at taking his first breath, introduced into the world as a future huntsman and warrior. This ceremony, however, has almost lost its meaning and ceases to be generally observed. On the 12th day after birth, the child is laid into the cradle by the mother or grandmother, who on this occasion gives the name, which in many instances is both well-sounding and significant: thus for boys—Belliappa (silver-father), Ponnappa (gold-father), Mandanna (the brother of the village-green); for girls—Púvakka (flower-sister), Muttakka (pearl-sister), Chinnawa (gold-mother).

The cradle, woven of slit bamboos and cane, and fitted to be hung up for swinging, requires but a little trimming to render it as tidy as any fashionable berceaunette; at all events the little Kodagu smiles and sleeps in it as happy as a prince; and as his mother bends over her darling with overflowing love and happiness and hums the Coorg lullaby:—